

# *Sketch*

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## Magic Lights and Hourglass Sand

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## Magic Lights and Hourglass Sand

*by Rolfe Lowrie*  
*Government, Soph.*

**D**AVID splashed through the shallow water, running ahead of the breaking waves, and then chasing the receding ripples. He fished a rock from the sand and threw it out over the lake. The rock smacked the water and skipped off into the darkness of Lake Michigan. Turning toward the glow of the city lights, he dodged another wave and ran toward the guard tower, where his friends were sitting.

"Did you see that rock bounce?"

George looked up from tying his shoe. "Not bad, Brodey." David liked this nickname. He smiled at his younger friend and sat down between him and Mary. The girl and her brother were his best friends, and he hadn't seen them for several months.

David glanced at Mary and smiled. Jesus, I'm glad they came down to school and asked me to come along. The girl handed him his shoes and leaned back on the sand.

"This is really nice, isn't it, David. Now are you glad you came along?"

He grinned and looked out over the lake. At first he hadn't planned on coming with them. But he came along because Mary had asked him to; and because she had convinced him that it would be good for him. "Yep," he finally

answered. "It's really nice here . . . . It's a change all right . . . ." He mumbled the last few words as he gazed at the water. He had come to Chicago to get away from it all . . . away from his recent days and nights of endless drug use, and drug talk, and drug thinking. I don't really want to leave here, he had thought, but I guess it could be pretty nice, going to Chi with Mary and George. Now he was here on the beach. He leaned back and counted the constellations he recognized, and listened for the rush of waves against the concrete windbreakers. He arched his neck and scanned the skyline of the city behind him. Jesus, he thought, this is really nice. He shivered a little and silently cleared his throat. "Yep . . . this is really OK."

"OK?" George yelled. "Damn! Whad'ya mean OK? It rocks, socks, brocks, and wheel-locks. This is Chi, Brodey, Chi!"

Mary smiled and stood up, dusting herself off. "What time is it, George?"

"Eight."

"Well, if we want to get to Buckingham Fountain in time, we'd better start back to the hotel. Let's walk along the shore to the pier."

David picked up his shoes and clapped them together as he walked. "Listen to that echo, will ya? You can always tell a good shoe, you know, by the way it echos under circumstances similar to these. I had a pair once. . . ."

"You sorrowful nothing," George interrupted, "you never had any other pair but those in your whole life."

"Oh really, George, you. . . ."

"If I found those shoes on the street, I'd take them to the nearest skyscraper, put them in a paper sack, and toss them over."

"But, George. . . ."

"And in that same paper sack'd be the guy who was wearing them. Jesus, what sorrowful shoes."

"OK, dog breath, quit worrying about my rather handsome shoes and give me a cigarette, will you?"

"Dog breath? Where did you get that one?"

"It just sprang to my lips, Breathy. Now give me a cigarette, and one for the young lady also . . . if you'd be so kind."

The three friends laughed and stopped to light cigarettes. Mary leaned against David and pointed to the skyline of bright lights against the black. "Wouldn't it be nice to live on the top of one of those buildings? Just think, we could go out there at night and look at the city and all. . . ."

He put his hand on her shoulder and drew her closer. "I'd like that. Well . . . I guess I'd more than like it."

"And our kids could run around up there, and we could get them little telescopes and maps of the city. . . ."

George threw away his cigarette and put his hands in his pockets. "What the hell are you two blabbing about?"

"We were just discussing," said David, "the possibility and subsequent advantages of living atop one of those taller buildings."

"That's funny talk for a person with shoes like yours."

"And what's wrong with. . . ."

"It's just that you'd be such a mess after riding all the way down to the street in a paper sack a couple of times, that you'd soon yelp and bitch to live in the subway." He walked a few steps ahead and then turned. "Well, come on!"

Mary and David smiled and loitered after him.

"Really, David, aren't you glad you're here instead of back in your crummy old apartment getting stoned and God knows what else?"

"Yea . . . I mean, I'm happy I'm here with you two . . . well, . . . what can I say? . . . this is really nice." David tapped his shoes together lightly and thought, as he walked along about the night before. . . .

The room was swirling and throbbing in washes of color and flashes of light. Quivering sitar vibrato and the hypnotic drone of a tambura flooded the room. David was lying obliviously on a mattress in one corner, while Janice sat on the floor.

She leaned over the mattress. "How many times have we heard this record?"

"I don't know. Today you mean?"

"Today, tonight, any time. I think it's cut a permanent groove in my mind."

"Oh." He turned to face the wall.

She dropped a hand on his stomach and shook him

lightly. "Hey, David, haven't we heard this record before?"

He didn't look up, but continued tracing imaginary patterns on the wall.

"David, haven't we heard this song before somewhere?"

"I don't know." He sat up and looked quizzically at her. "Did you just ask me if we had heard this record before?" He didn't wait for an answer, but jumped up and walked toward the record player. I wonder what record this is, he thought.

Janice leaned from side to side, gazing at the lights and at David. "When did we drop the acid? I can't remember coming over here tonight. We're still up, aren't we?"

"I think so. We must be." He walked over to the dresser and leaned on it to look at himself in the mirror. He opened his eyes widely and rolled his head in all directions. "Look at those eyes, will you. They're black. They're nothing but black. Jesus . . . who is that guy? Hey . . . there's this guy over here with black eyes who's really unbelievable. Look at this guy . . . he's just too handsome to believe."

"David, aren't you going to change this record? I really hate it."

"Did you say something just then? I've been looking at this guy over here, you know. . . ."

"David, weren't we going to get rid of that record?"

"What?"

"We were just talking about the record, weren't we?"

"About the record? . . . when was that?"

Janice sat up suddenly and cocked her head to one side. "What time is it?" She stood up and turned a little circle, looking at the floor below her. "Hey really, I wonder what time it is. It's Monday night, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I think it was Monday when we dropped the stuff, but when was that?"

"David," she began to cry, "what's going on? What day is it? Are you really talking to me? Am I alive?"

"Yes, we're alive." David was following a spot of light around the room. He rolled his head after the spot and stared at the objects it passed over. He jumped toward the bookcase where he had lost sight of the spot. "Look at all these things on here!" He walked along the shelf, touching and picking up books, and photographs, and ashtrays.

"David, are we still alive?"

"And look at this!" His eyes opened wide as he carefully picked up a small, green egg timer. He carefully held it at arm's length, slowly turning it upside-down and then upright again. "Look at these little stars floating in here. Look at them. One, two, three, four, five. . . ."

Janice put both hands to her mouth and gazed around the room, as if looking for something she had lost. "David . . . David? . . ."

He put down the egg timer and turned to her. "Look at all this stuff. Look at these lights. I wonder if that guy's still over on the dresser. . . ." He turned several fast little circles, his head dropped backwards, and his arms stretched out fully. Suddenly he stopped spinning and stared incredulously at one of the stereo speakers. He ran his hand slowly across the speaker front. "Hey look. Here's Ravi Shankar. He's sort of smallish, but I keep bumping him with my hand. Look, he's sitting here playing right through it all. Wow . . . he *must* be good."

Janice dropped down and sprawled on the mattress beside him. "Ravi Shankar, smallish! That's too much; that's just too much. You must really be freaking."

David looked frantically at her, back to the speaker, and at her again. "He's there. He's there. Look!" He stared at the speaker again and ran his fingers over the small lump that was Ravi. "Look, dope, there he is, playing and everything."

The girl sat up and carefully peered at the speaker. "I can't see him."

"Of course you can't," David snapped, "of course you can't. You're too down. If you know what I mean."

"What do you. . . ."

"If you know what I mean . . . if you know what I mean." He repeated the phrase in several different voices and gestures. "If you know what I mean. . . ."

"Know what I mean," Janice started up, "know what I mean. . . ."

The two exchanged a variety of greetings with the line, and finally stopped when they both started laughing.

"Excuse me, miss; but aren't you presently under the influence of that hideous drug, that demon, that devil in pill's clothing, . . . acid?"

"Why yes, sir, I believe I am. And you?"

"Just fine thanks. Two lumps, please; and easy on the cream."

Janice jumped back and frowned at him. "That's not very funny . . . what you just said." She stood up again and backed away from him. "Why did you say that about being fine? What are you trying to do? Why'd you say it?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine. . . ." David hummed the words and waved an imaginary baton through the air. He stood up on the mattress and gestured vigorously toward the armchair with his extended left arm and stabbed the imaginary baton at the sofa. He gestured a heavy vibrato with his left hand at the dresser and then called for a tremendous crescendo from the coffee table.

Janice grabbed his arm and pushed it behind him. "You aren't fine. You can't conduct that furniture. They can't sing. They won't. . . ." She ran to the sofa and stood on it. "This sofa and table are my friends. All these lights are my friends. We're fine. I'm fine. . . ."

David walked over to the armchair and started listening closely for its pitch. Then he heard a knock on the door. He froze in his bent-over position and listened intently. The knock came again. Janice got up and crept into the kitchen. He slowly walked to the door. "Yes?" he asked weakly.

"Open up, man!"

"Who is it?"

"It's Charlie, damn it. Open up. It's dark out here."

David stood behind the door as he opened it. Charlie peeked his head around the corner and stared at him. "Is that you, David?"

David nodded his head and stared at Charlie. He was one of their best friends, but he looked so strange, so different.

"That's a pretty freaky hall you've got out there. You really should have it lighted or something."

David stared at his face and put a hand out to touch his chest. "Hey, Charlie, you are Charlie, aren't you?"

"Sure I am. Why?"

"Well, I just wanted to know."

Now Janice had come back into the room. She looked at the boy and carefully walked as far away from him as possible. She turned to David, "Hey, what's that boy doing here?" He just stared at the visitor.

"Oh hi, Janice," the boy offered. "What's going on?"

She cocked her head at him, but didn't answer. Charlie looked at both of them for a few seconds and then smiled broadly. "Oh, I see! Hey, you two are really lost, aren't you?"

She jumped back a step. "I'm not lost. You can't say that. I'm the one who should say that about you. You're lost, not me. Who are you anyway?"

"Janice," he tried, "it's me, Charlie. Your best friend, Charlie. I'm a friend of yours. Remember?"

"Oh, yes. You're Charlie. Do I like you?"

"Yes, you. . . ."

"No. I don't think I like you. I don't like you. All these beautiful lights like me. I like them too. They're my friends."

David went over to her. "I think he really is our friend Charlie. Yes, he's. . . ."

"These are my friends," she said and danced away from him and onto the sofa. "These are my light friends. And only I can see them, so don't try to say you can. What's that boy doing here? He's lost. Get him out of here. I don't like him. Get him out." She sat down suddenly and stared vacantly at the boy. "What's your name?"

David held on to his head with both hands and whined, "He's our friend Charlie, Janice. He's our friend."

She started a smile and then gestured with a full sweep of her arms around the room. "All these things are my friends. You can look at them if you like, but you won't really see them. Neither of you will see them."

David took her by the arm and shook her slightly. "We can see everything. We can see everything, you know."

She broke loose from his hold and darted to the center of the room. "No. You can't say that. You're not real. I'm only imagining you're here. It's all a dream. I'm going to think you right out of it. You aren't anything but a dream. I don't have to see you."

David sat down on the armchair and bent his head over, shaking it slowly and mumbling to himself, "She's ruining everything, she's ruining everything. . . ."

Charlie walked over to the chair and whispered to his friend. "She's really freaking, isn't she? She's really confused."



"I heard that," Janice screamed. "I heard what you said. But you're wrong. You're not real. I'm real. You're nothing. You're lost. Get out, get out, get out." She picked a book off the dresser and threw it at Charlie. "Get out. I hate you. My friends hate you. You're lost."

The boy stood by David, trying to decide what to say. "David, will you tell her . . . will you straighten her out. . . ."

"Get out. I hate you." She threw another book at him and fell down on the sofa. "Leave; leave; leave!"

David walked over to her. "Janice, don't. He's our friend. You're ruining everything for everybody."

"Out! Out, out, out, out!"

Charlie hurried to the door and opened it. "See you later, David . . . when everything's OK again." He glanced at the girl again, and then shut the door behind him.

David flopped himself down on the mattress and covered his head with a pillow. He could still hear Janice talking to him from the sofa. "I didn't like that boy, David. He tried to ruin my good time. He wasn't really a friend, was he?"

David got up and put another record on the spindle, and then fell into his armchair. His head was spinning with pictures of Janice on the couch, and Charlie, and hundreds of books flying at some shadow of a person. He felt himself coming down fast.

Janice wandered toward him, looking in all directions. "He's gone, isn't he?" He shook his head, yes; and she sat down on the floor in front of him. They sat there for several minutes before she tapped him on the knee. "Who was that boy who was here before? Was it Ravi Shankar?" He shook his head and answered, no.

"Oh, yes," Janice thought aloud, "Ravi was that smallish sort of man who used to be over there in front of the speaker." She stood up and walked to the record player, and then to one of the speakers. "Look at the notes, David. They're coming right over your head. Be careful not to stand up now." She danced an erratic little circle in the far corner of the room, catching and releasing the notes as they floated out of the speaker.

David lit a cigarette and leaned back into the armchair.

It was too late to catch Charlie by now. He would just have to sit and watch Janice. Except for the throbbing and flashing of music and lights, there was nothing . . .

What a scene, David mumbled to himself as he dodged a breaking wave. Mary looked over to him. "What did you say?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking." He gazed at the skyline beyond the beach. He splashed his feet through the water and watched the small boats that bobbed in place by their buoys. This is really perfect, he thought: Mary, George, the lake, and the city. He picked up a piece of driftwood and threw it out into the black water, listening for the quiet splash. "Look at those damn buildings," he finally said. "They're really something, aren't they!"

George stopped suddenly and turned around. "'Really something!' You call that giant, electric, ultracelestial mind hassle of a light show 'really something'? . . . Damn!"

David smiled. "I know. I'm so sorrowful I ought to be dropped from the tallest building in town. . . ."

"Don't forget the paper sack part, Brodey," George quickly added.

"Yes, I know. In a paper sack. . . ."

"And now that I think of it, bitch dog," George continued, "in a paper sack with a windshield, so you can see what's happening."

"OK, with a windshield." David ran up to the other two and sat down on the beach. "Let me put these shoes on, will you?"

Mary and George also sat down, and started to scratch the sand with twigs. Mary scooped up a handful of the wet sand. "Wow . . . feel how nice and cool this is." She sprinkled it into David's hand.

He closed his fingers over the grains. "Yea . . . that is nice."

George grabbed a fistful and also tested it. "Yep . . . it's not bad, Brodey. . . ."

The three friends stood up, brushed off their hands, and walked slowly toward the pier at the end of the beach.